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San Antonio Express-News

EXPRESSNEWS.COM | Thursday, April 16, 2020 | Vol. 155, No. 199 | The voice of South Texas since 1865 | $2.00

Mostly sunny: High 77, Low 63

S.A. infection surge projected

Various outcomes shown, depending on how social distancing is relaxed

By Brian Chasnoff
STAFF WRITER

Using Metro Health data, two teams at the University of Texas at San Antonio predict an astronomical increase in local coronavirus cases without continued social distancing measures.

As leaders across the country begin to consider how to restart the sputtering economy, one of the modelers – Juan Gutierrez, chairman of UTSA's math department – called the deadly virus "unstoppable" without a vaccine.

"With the evidence that we have, (the virus) cannot be stopped," Gutierrez said. "We're going to change our social norms, the way we operate, the way we work, until there is a vaccine."

Under current local restrictions, Gutierrez has projected about 3,600 total cases of the novel coronavirus in Bexar County through July, with a peak coming in early May.

His model projects that number would leap to 300,000 with just a 50 percent increase in mobility – people leaving their homes, shopping, going to work and socializing – while a sudden return to normal would bring 920,000 total cases.

Another university initiative, Project Alpha, used artificial intelligence to project a much higher toll even under current conditions: about 29,818 total cases here through August, with a peak arriving in mid-May.

If measures are relaxed by 50 percent, the model projects that number would rocket to 641,000, and a return to normal would bring 850,608 cases.

Bexar County has recorded a total of 890 cases since the outbreak began – up 75 from Tuesday

Models continues on A6

AG says fear not enough for mail votes

By Benjamin Wermund and Zach Despart
STAFF WRITERS

WASHINGTON – Just as a Texas judged opened the door to more voting by mail amid the coronavirus pandemic, the state's attorney general is trying to slam it shut.

Voters can't cast ballots by mail just because they're afraid of getting the novel coronavirus at polling places, Attorney General Ken Paxton said Wednesday, even as a state district judge in Austin said he'll rule that voters can vote by mail if they believe doing so in person puts their health at risk.

The judge's apparent decision was an early victory for the Texas Democratic Party and a slew of civil rights and voter advocacy groups seeking to expand voting by mail in Texas, but it almost certainly will be appealed, and Republican Paxton's pronouncement makes it clear the state has no plans to open up 2020 elections to more voting by mail.

"Our voting rights have been under attack for decades, long before the coronavirus pandemic reached the borders of our state," Texas Democratic Party Chairman Gilberto Hinojosa said

Votes continues on A6

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Coronavirus at a glance

637,716	16,166	890	30,826	387	37
Confirmed cases in U.S.	In Texas	In Bexar County	Deaths in U.S.	In Texas	In Bexar County

Source: WHO, CDC, Johns Hopkins University

Some homeless are given a safe space in local hotel

Bob Owen / Staff photographer

The city and Haven for Hope are using a hotel to house homeless people. A worker pushes a cart labeled PCY, for Prospects Courtyard, with bags of personal items.

By Sara Cline
STAFF WRITER

Local hotels have seen a steep drop in occupancy during the coronavirus pandemic, but one shuttered inn now has more than 70 new guests – homeless people from the Haven for Hope shelter.

Vacant hotels have become a tool in the fight to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus in San Antonio. They can offer shelter to homeless individuals who are at a higher risk from the virus and serve as a place for people who have tested positive to self-quarantine.

The city has signed a contract with the 300-room hotel to provide temporary shelter for up to 400 homeless people.

As of Tuesday evening, 78 homeless people from Haven for Hope who are at high risk from COVID-19 – those 55 or older or who have underlying health issues – had moved into the hotel.

"Haven for Hope continues ramping up operations and anticipates moving in more than 300 clients from the campus by midweek this week," city spokesman Carlos Valenzuela said.

City officials and Haven for Hope would not identify the hotel being used, citing privacy concerns.

However, sources said it's the Holiday Inn Downtown. On Wednesday, people wearing

Hotel continues on A6

Kin Man Hui / Staff photographer

This was the scene last week when thousands of people lined up in their vehicles to await a distribution by the San Antonio Food Bank at Traders Village on the South Side.

Food Bank is ready to get federal help

By Tom Orsborn
STAFF WRITER

All 16 South Texas counties served by the San Antonio Food Bank are expected to receive badly needed help after Gov. Greg Abbott asked for federal assistance for the entire state.

"I don't have any reason to believe it won't be approved" by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, said Celia Cole, CEO of Feeding Texas, a 21-member statewide network of food banks. "To me, every indication points to it being approved."

Earlier, the San Antonio Food Bank had trimmed its request for emergency state aid from $12 million to $9.6 million just for Bexar County.

The request was rendered moot when Abbott sought help from FEMA for all of Texas' 254 counties – not just for the major food banks serving South Texas, West Texas, North Texas and Houston.

"It's thumbs up. It's happening," said an elated Eric Cooper, president and CEO of the San Antonio Food Bank. "It's a victory. It really is like manna from heaven in a lot of ways."

FEMA all but committed to procuring 44 million pounds of food for Texas.

Feeding Texas worked with the Texas Division of Emergency Management and Abbott's office

Food continues on A7

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